

Happy School Days: Tuition Free for Five-year-olds and Burden Free for Parents

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The financial aid for the five-year-old preschoolers (hereafter referred as “the free tuition project”) for the second semester of this academic year will start in March, and the deadline of application is April 15. Parents whose children were born between September 2nd, 2009 and September 1st, 2010 should contact the kindergartens where their children study or visit the website of Early Childhood Educare (<http://www.ece.moe.edu.tw>) for further information regarding the free tuition projects.

The free tuition project has two major categories: tuition waiver and allowances for children in financially distressed families (hereafter referred as “allowances for the financially distressed”). The five-year-old studying in public kindergartens are granted full tuition waiver when their preschool studies begin, while those in private kindergartens can receive subsidy or voucher for tuition waiver up to NTD15,000 per child in each semester. Moreover, children from financially distressed families, which are defined as annual household income below NTD 700,000, can apply for additional allowances. Those in public kindergartens can receive extra allowances ranging between NTD 6,000 to NTD 10,000 per child in each semester. If they study in private kindergartens, extra allowances ranging from NTD 5,000 to NTD 15,000 can be granted in the same manner as the cases in public kindergartens. For further details regarding the amount of allowances in relation to different stratified levels of income, please refer to the appendix.

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), since the free tuition project for the five-year-old preschoolers was incepted on a whole coverage in the academic year of 2011, the number of people benefiting from this project has been estimated to be over 190,000 for every academic year. Thus, this policy has attained the goal of relieving financial burdens of parents and enhancing head start opportunities for preschool children, with the entrance rate of the five-year-old and those from the financially distressed reaching over 96% in the academic year of 2015. What’s more, the free tuition project is packaged with several accommodating measures to enhance the preschool education access for children. For example, the government has been providing local governments with subsidies to establish more public kindergartens, with the number reaching 102 classes in the academic year of 2015. Additional subsidies have been provided to over 1,500 public kindergartens for the upgrading of their educational facilities and equipment, in order to ensure quality education services. Furthermore, to ease up the burden for

working parents, free after-school care has been provided by public kindergartens to take care of children from the financially distressed families, which has covered about 34,000 people.

The free tuition project and its accommodating measures serve to relieve financial burdens of preschoolers' families and raise the enrollment rate of kindergartens for five-year-olds. Teachers who worked on the frontline were happy to discover that the free tuition project and subsidies helped to improve the relationship between teachers and parents. In the process of assisting parents with the application for additional allowances, kindergarten staff could develop more understanding of the financial situation of each and every applying families and provide necessary assistance in time.

The MOE also like to remind low-middle income parents of the availability of other similar programs for children of various ages. Parents can turn to the township, city or district public office of their residence for relevant application requirements. After obtaining the proof of low-middle income household, parents can submit it to the staff in the kindergarten for tuition waiver application.

In order to provide a safe and adequate learning environment, the MOE will seek to secure funds for education programs that serve to alleviate parents' burdens on childcare. Furthermore, the MOE will actively seek to enhance the public education services and increase the number of excellent and high quality kindergartens with greater affordability and accessibility, so that kids can enjoy learning while growing up, thereby laying a solid foundation for developing a good moral character.